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(54) **TEAM-BUILDING EDUCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM**

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A47D 15/00 (2006.01)
A47G 9/06 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **G09B 19/00** (2013.01); **A47D 15/003** (2013.01); **A47G 9/062** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
USPC 434/237
See application file for complete search history.

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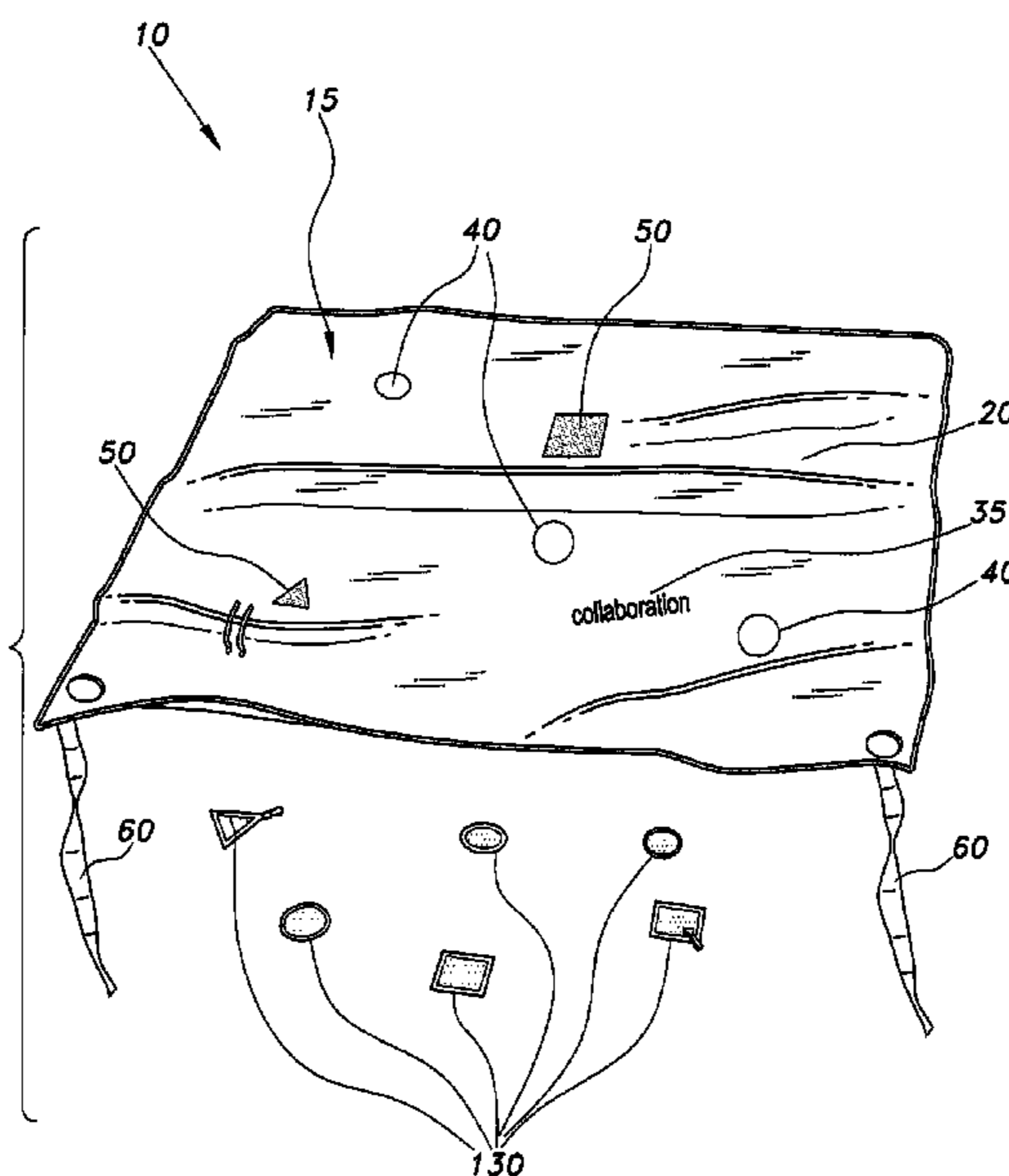
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The team-building educational training system includes a mat and a plurality of reflective surfaces, such as mirrors. The mat has a top surface, a bottom surface, and a plurality of openings defined therein. The top and bottom surfaces each have a plurality of uniquely identifiable indicia displayed thereon. The reflective surfaces are placed on the floor or ground under the mat. The team cooperatively lifts and manipulates the mat to align the openings with the reflective surfaces so that at least one team member can view reflections of the indicia on the reflective surfaces. The team cooperatively interprets the indicia and completes a variety of planned exercises to learn skills for working as a team.

18 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



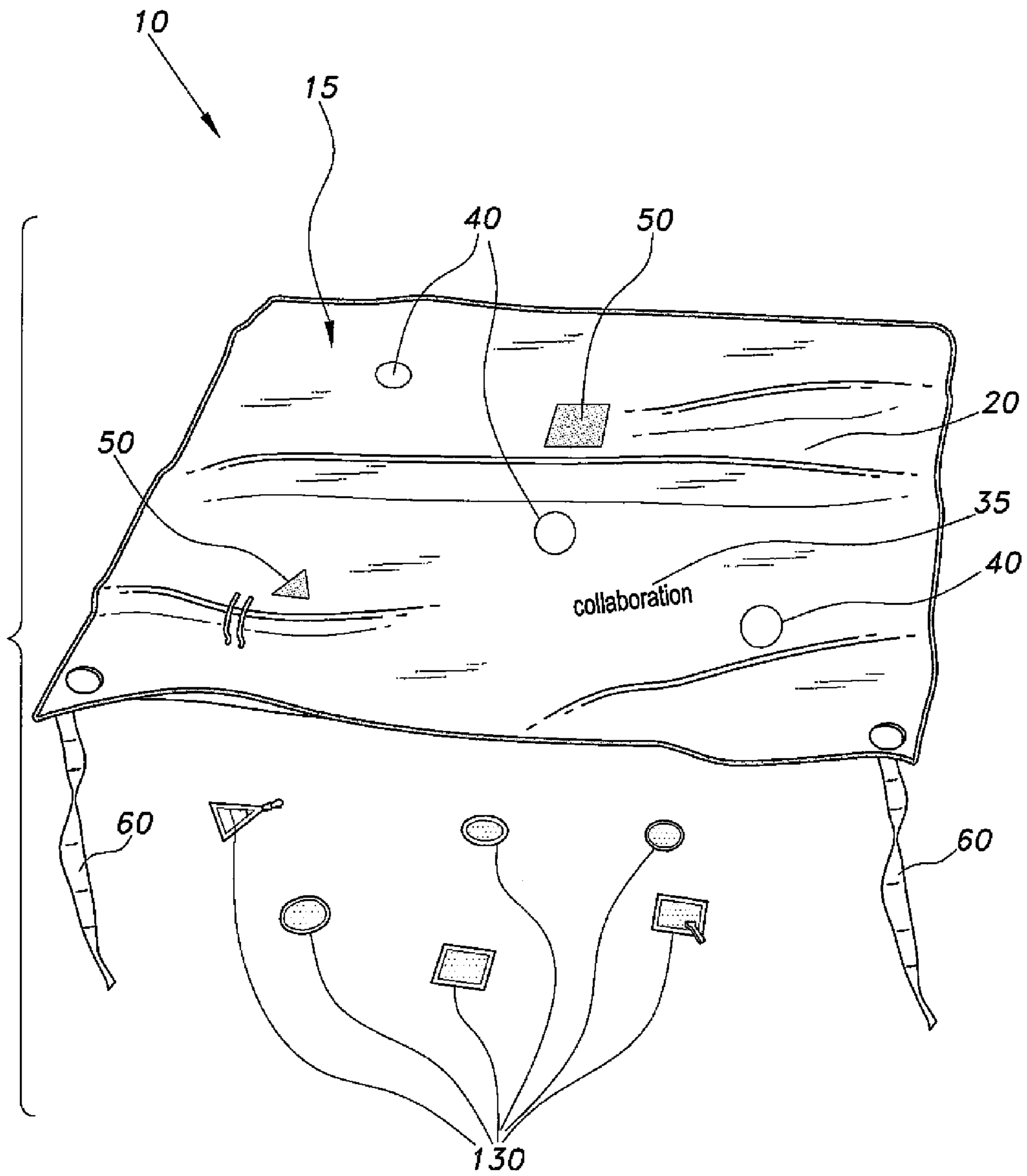


Fig. 1

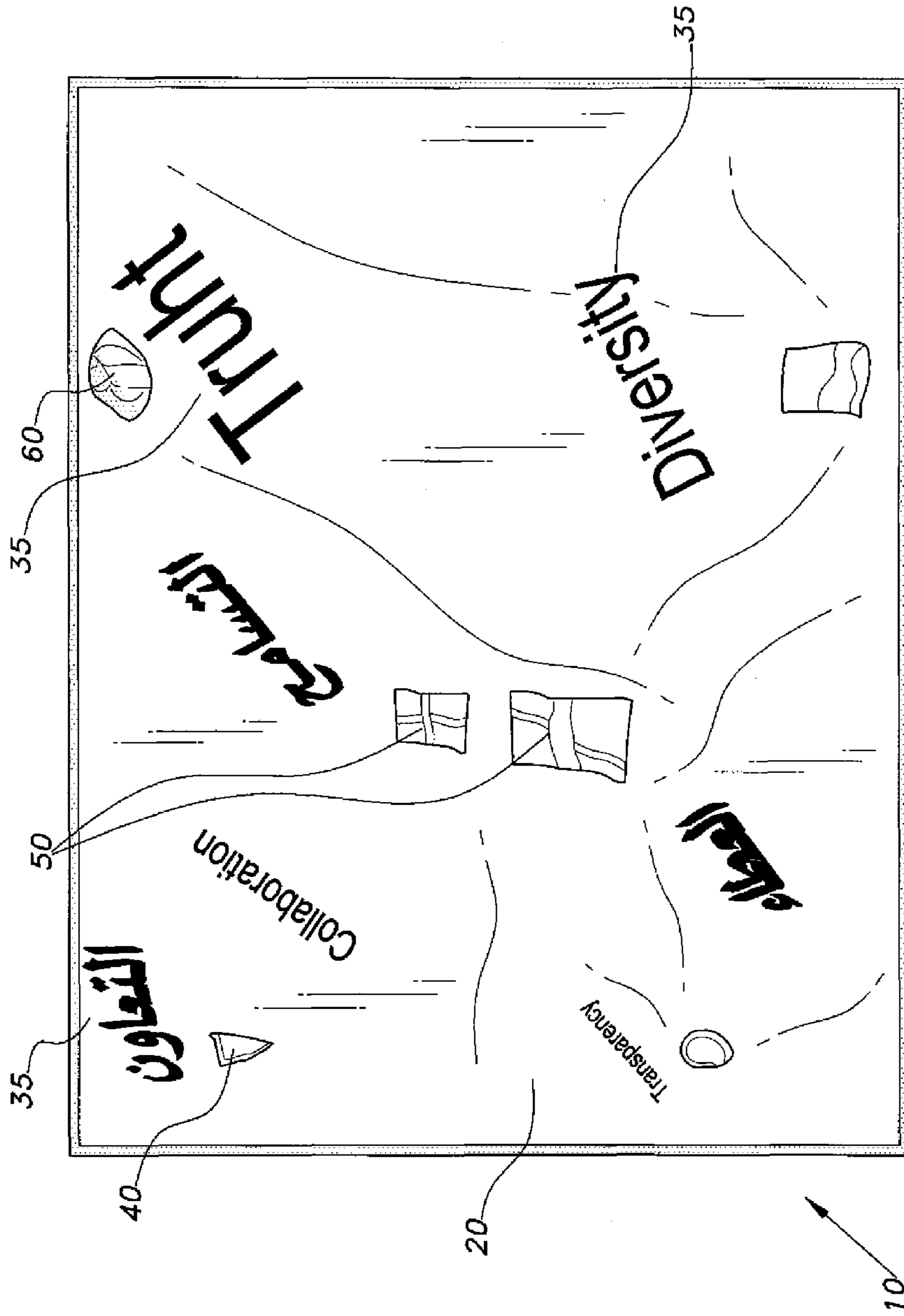


Fig. 2

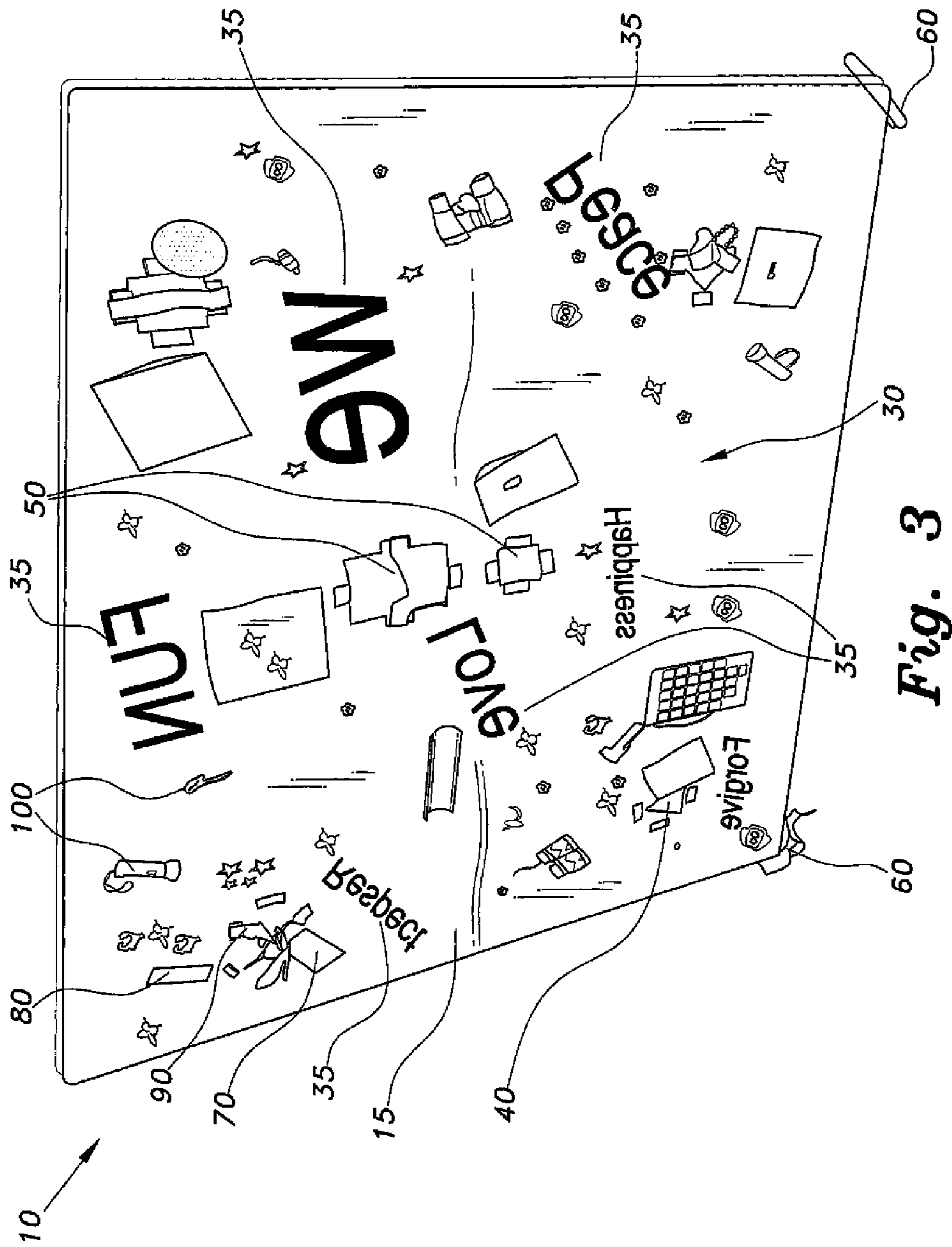


Fig. 3

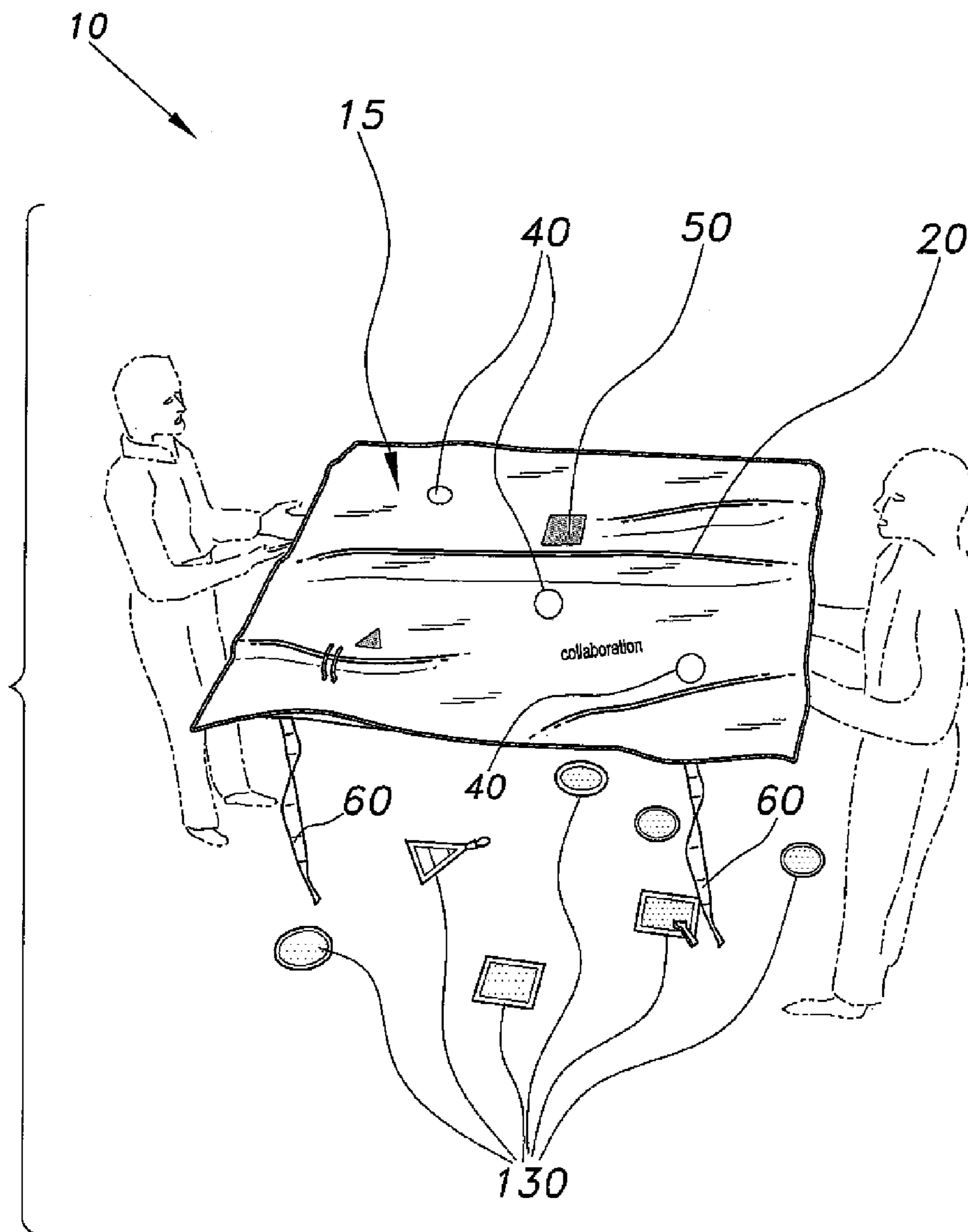


Fig. 4

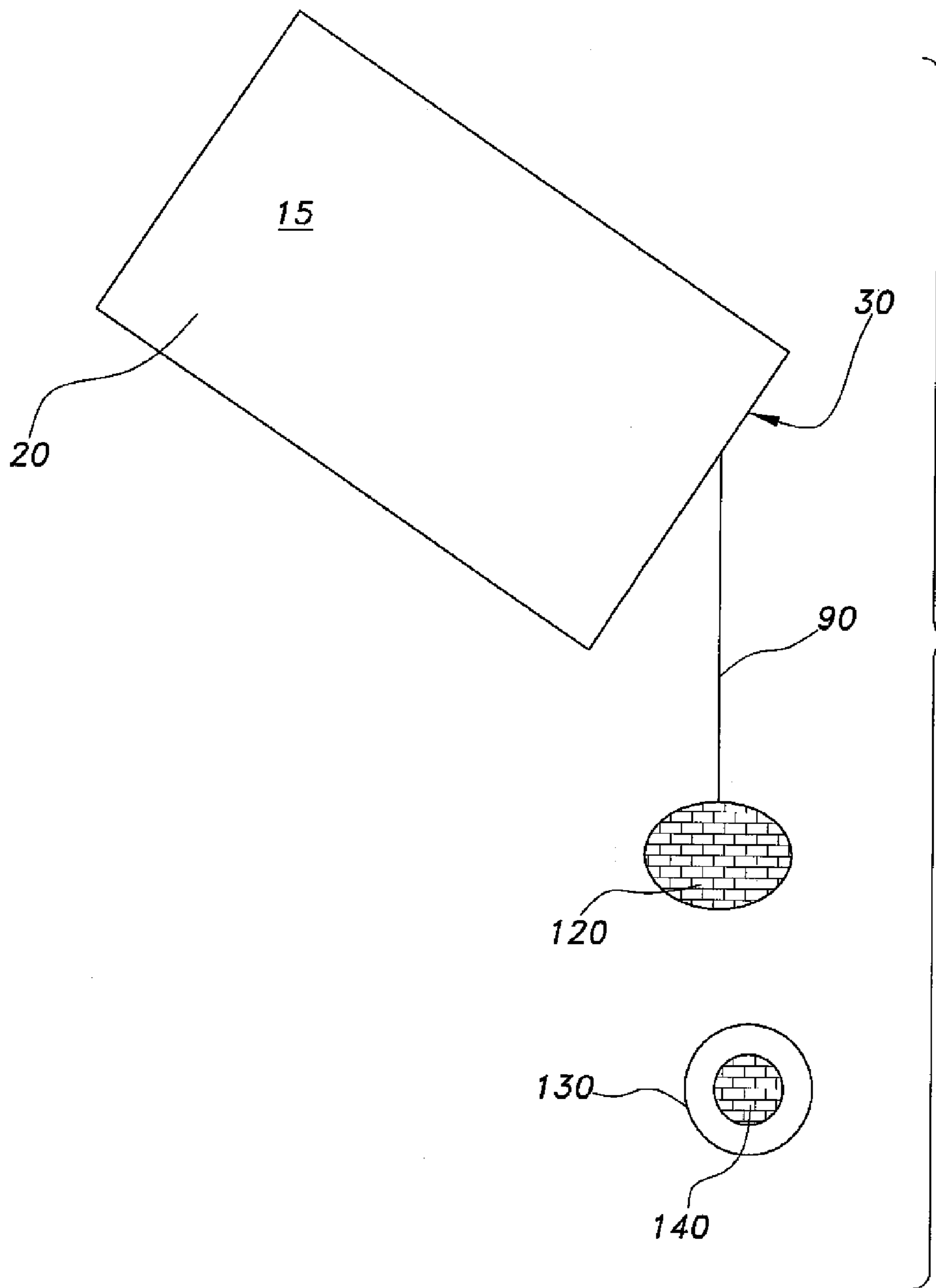


Fig. 5

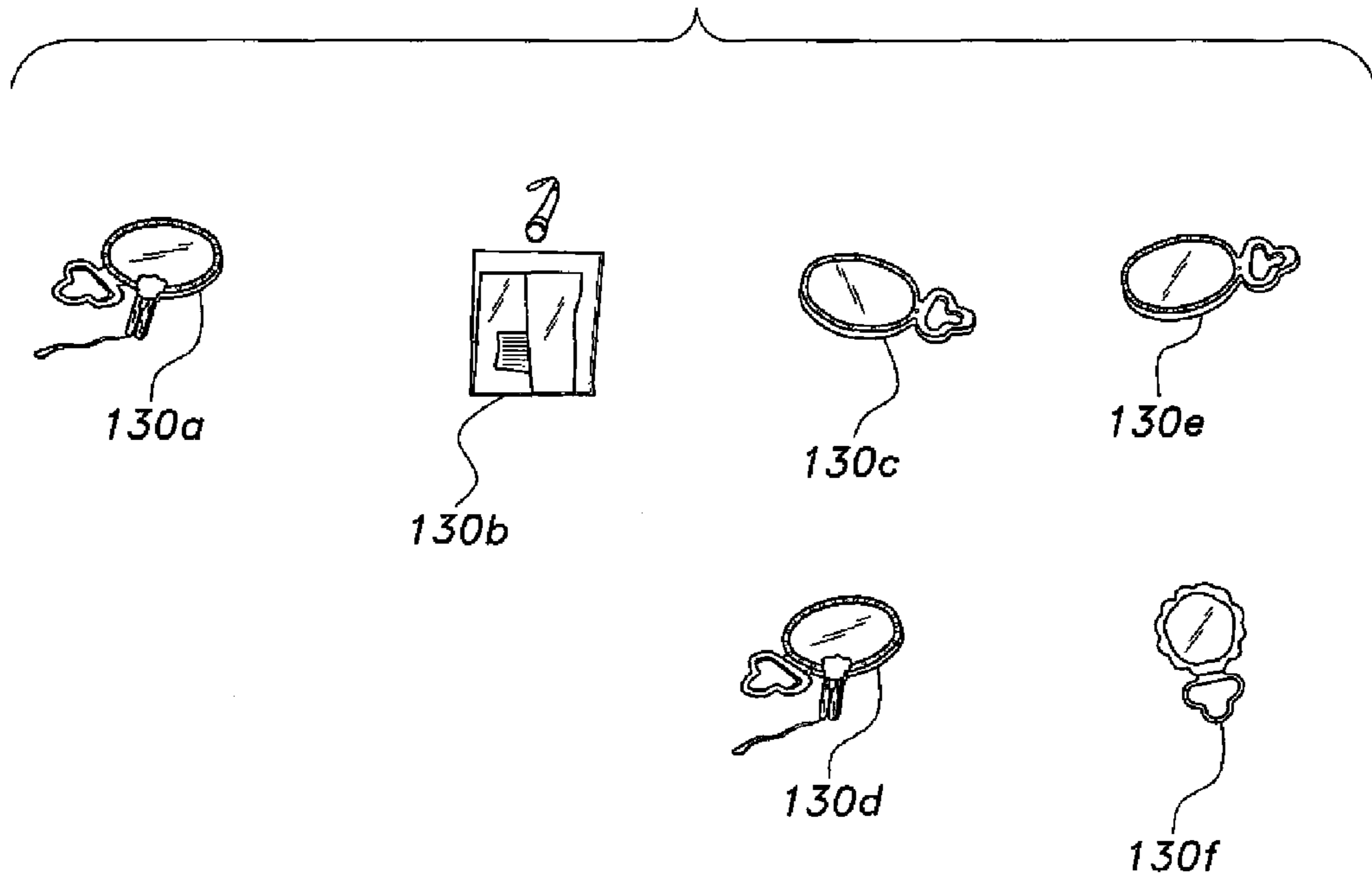


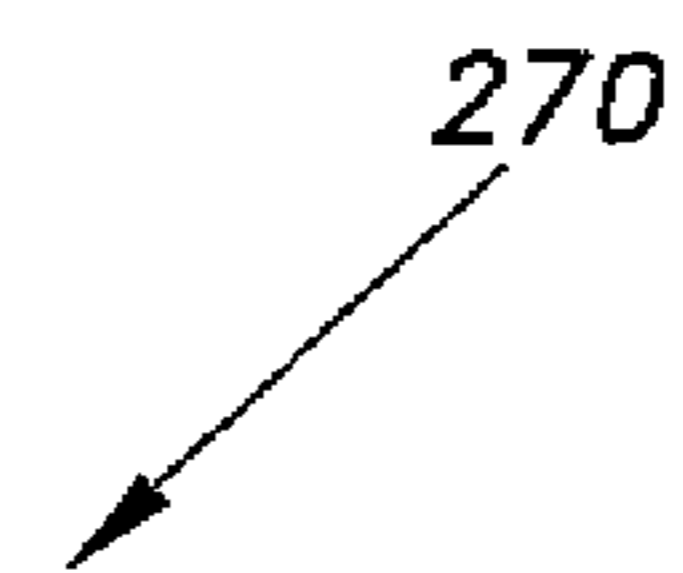
Fig. 6

Objective(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To gain a common shared set of communication experiences 160 - To discover underlying issues inhibiting clear communication. 165 - To experience new communication behaviors and skill sets.
Result(s) desired:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing work productivity. 170 - Enhancing ability to discover & resolve issues. 175 - Improving communication effectiveness. 180
Time:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1-2 hours 190
Team involvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teams of 2,4, or 6 engage in conjointly holding and perceiving values and other characteristics by looking through mirrors and then assembling reflections into perceptions, interpretations, and then conclusions. 200
Requirements:	<p>Multi mirrored mat imprinted with values and other terms.</p>

Fig. 7

Objective(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To discover & overcome the challenges to collaboration. - To learn how to overcome the natural tendency to compete. - To enable & practice skill sets that will be employed across any teamwork environment.
Result(s) desired:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing team bonding & awareness. - Enhancing ability to discover & resolve issues. - Improving the effectiveness of any group activity.
Time:	-1-2.5 hours
Team involvement:	-Teams of 2,4, or 6 engage in conjointly holding and perceiving values and other characteristics by looking through mirrors and then assembling reflections into perceptions, interpretations, and then conclusions.
Requirements:	Multi mirrored mat imprinted with values and other terms.

Fig. 8



Objective(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To discover insights in solving problems. 275 - To learn new methods for problem solving. 280
Result(s) desired:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanding the range of options available. 285 - Finding & Implementing better solutions. 290 - Increasing solution acceptance. 300
Time:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1-2 hours 305 310
Team involvement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teams of 2,4, or 6 engage in conjointly holding and perceiving values and other characteristics by looking through mirrors and then assembling reflections into perceptions, interpretations, and then conclusions.
Requirements:	<p>Multi mirrored mat imprinted with values and other terms.</p>

Fig. 9

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TEAM-BUILDING EDUCATIONAL TRAINING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to educational devices and methods for providing instruction and training in skills need to work as a member of a team, and more particularly to an interactive team-building educational training system.

2. Description of the Related Art

Team-building educational training systems are considered one of the most effective ways in which students and employees are taught to work together to achieve a common goal, as well as developing communication skills. Such systems typically can be used to introduce an unknown individual to a group of people, as well as to encourage people to work together to improve productivity. For example, through the use of such systems, people (typically those who work in the same company or organization) learn to communicate with one another to achieve a common goal, instead of working individually to achieve the same goal. Encouraging employees to work in an interdependent environment instead of a competitive, individualistic environment when dealing with the development of new products or services, for example, can not only increase a company's productivity, but can also lead to a happier work force and a more relaxing work environment.

Unfortunately, while these team-building systems focus on the collaborative aspect when encouraging team building, they do not help people to develop their skills of perception.

Thus, a team-building educational training system addressing the aforementioned problem is desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The team-building educational training system generally includes a mat having a plurality of openings defined therein, a top surface, and a bottom surface, each surface including uniquely identifiable indicia, the system further including a plurality of reflective surfaces positioned under the mat and arranged to reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia on the bottom surface of the mat. The reflective surfaces can be arranged randomly or can be arranged according to a pre-set pattern on the floor or ground under the bottom portion of the mat. The mat can include at least one light source to illuminate reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia on the bottom surface of the mat. The uniquely identifiable indicia can be selected from the group consisting of colors, numbers, symbols, signs (such as zodiac signs), words, or any combination thereof.

The mat can be configured to be manipulated by a plurality of users to align an opening with a reflective surface in order to see reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia imprinted on the bottom surface of the mat. Once a reflection of the uniquely identifiable indicia has been discovered, the mat is further manipulated to discover additional reflections of additional uniquely identifiable indicia imprinted on the bottom surface of the mat. After the users have discovered all of the uniquely identifiable indicia imprinted on the bottom surface of the mat necessary to complete a given objective, the users have completed a team-building educational exercise.

These and other features of the present invention will become readily apparent upon further review of the following specification and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

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FIG. 2 is a top view of a mat in a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view showing the bottom surface of a mat according to the present invention.

FIG. 4 is an environmental perspective view of participants utilizing the team building educational training system according to the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a schematic perspective view of the team building educational training system of FIG. 1, showing a ball suspended from the bottom surface of the mat being reflected by a mirror on the floor.

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of a kit of reflective surfaces in a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a top view of a set of sample instructions for an exercise using a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a top view of an alternative set of sample instructions for an exercise using a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

FIG. 9 is a top view of another alternative set of sample instructions for an exercise using a team-building educational training system according to the present invention.

Similar reference characters denote corresponding features consistently throughout the attached drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to FIGS. 1-6, a team-building educational training system 10 generally includes a mat 15 having a plurality of openings 40 defined therein, a top surface 20, and a bottom surface 30 (shown in FIG. 3), each surface 20, 30 including uniquely identifiable indicia 35, the system 10 further including a plurality of reflective surfaces 130 (FIG. 4), such as mirrors, that are positioned in relation to the mat 15, such as on the floor or ground underneath the mat 15, and that are arranged to reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia 35 imprinted on the bottom surface 30 of the mat 15, wherein users manipulate the mat 15 to align at least one of the plurality of openings 40 with at least one of the plurality of reflective surfaces 130 to be able to see the reflection 140 of the uniquely identifiable indicia 35 imprinted on the bottom surface 30 of the mat 15. It is to be noted that the plurality of reflective surfaces 130 can include a variety of shapes and designs, such as reflective surfaces 130a, 130b, 130c, 130d, 130e, and 130f, as illustrated in FIG. 6.

Each of the plurality of openings 40 can include a corresponding cover 70 (shown in FIG. 3). The mat 15 can also be adapted to include at least one transparent section 50 or window (preferably a plurality of transparent sections 50) and at least one flexible member 60 (preferably a plurality of flexible members 60), such as a tether or strap, attached to the mat 15 so that users can manipulate the mat 15. The flexible material 60 can be positioned in the corners of the mat 15, as illustrated in FIG. 1, or can be positioned towards the center of the mat 15, as illustrated in FIG. 2. The flexible member(s) 60 can be formed from any suitable flexible material, such as plastic. The at least one opening 40 can be formed in various shapes, such as a circle, triangle, square, a zigzag, or a combination thereof.

The mat 15 may have a pocket 80 holding cards, such as playing cards, and at least one crescent-shaped flexible member 90 (preferably a plurality of crescent-shaped flexible members 90) for hanging objects 120 (such as balls, signs, and other objects) from the bottom surface 30 of the mat 15 when the mat 15 is elevated so that the reflection 140 can be

shown by the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**, as illustrated in FIG. **5**. The mat **15** can further be configured to include at least one light source **100** (preferably a plurality of light sources **100**), such as a flashlight or a glow stick, which can be configured to illuminate the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15**. The light source **100**, such as a flashlight, can be adapted to include a power source, such a battery, to illuminate the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15**.

It is to be understood that the mat **15** can be of any suitable size, such as eight feet wide and nine feet long. Further, the corners of the mat **15** can be of various shapes, such as square corners or corners of a generally square shape, as illustrated in FIGS. **1-4**. The mat **15** can be formed of any suitable material, such as plastic, rubber, natural or synthetic fibers, a nonwoven polymer mat or film sheet, or other flexible material.

The uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the mat **15** can include educational puzzles, such as a word search puzzle in which a set of two words is hidden within a variety of other words and the object of the game is to discover the set of two words. The uniquely identifiable indicia **35** can also include misspelled words, illustrations, anagrams, ciphers, crossword puzzles, as well as different colors, different numbers, different symbols, different signs (such as zodiac signs), different words, or any combination thereof. It is to be noted that the words can be presented backwards, or can be distorted. Additionally, the font of the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the mat **15** can be of one or more different types, of one or more different styles, of one or more different sizes, or a combination thereof.

By way of operation, a group of individuals can be divided into separate teams, typically including two, four, or six people. Before using the system **10**, the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** can be positioned in relation to the mat **15**, such as on the floor or ground underneath the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15**. The plurality of reflective surfaces **130** can be arranged on a floor with the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** facing upward, as illustrated in FIGS. **1** and **4**. It must be noted that the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** can be randomly arranged, or can be arranged in a pre-set pattern beneath the bottom portion **30** of the mat **15**. The participants on each team can then take hold of the mat **15** by either taking grasping the mat **15** directly, or by taking hold of the at least one flexible member **60** attached to the mat **15**. Once the participants have control of the mat **15** or the flexible member(s) **60**, the mat **15** can be lifted from the floor and held above of the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** so that the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** can reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15**, as illustrated in FIG. **4**.

Continuing with reference to FIG. **4**, once the participants have lifted the mat **15** and are holding the mat **15** above the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** the mat **15** can be manipulated so that the participants can look through the opening(s) **40** or through the transparent section(s) **50** to view the image of the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** being reflected on the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**, as illustrated by the reflection **140** in FIG. **5**. For example, the participants can communicate with one another to lift the mat **15** upwards, lower the mat **15** downwards, or even twist the mat **15** so that at least one team member can look through the opening(s) **40** or through the transparent section(s) **50** to see the reflection **140** of the uniquely identifiable indicia on at least one of the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**.

As illustrated in FIG. **7**, an example of an exercise **150** incorporating the system **10** includes as its objectives to gain a common shared set of communication experiences **155**, to

discover underlying issues inhibiting clear communication **160**, and to experience new communication behaviors and skill sets **165**. As such, the desired results include increasing work productivity **170**, enhancing ability to discover and resolve issues **175**, and improving communication effectiveness **180**. To complete this exercise **150**, the participants need approximately between one to two hours **190**. The participants can be separated into teams of two, four, or six participants engaged in conjointly holding and perceiving the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** and other characteristics by holding the mat **15** above the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** and then working together to manipulate the mat **15** in order to be able to see reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15** to assemble perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions **200**.

As illustrated in FIG. **8**, an alternative exercise **210** of an application incorporating the system **10** includes as its objectives to discover and overcome the challenges to collaboration **200**, to learn how to overcome the natural tendency to compete **225**, and to enable and practice skill sets that will be employed across any teamwork environment **230**. As such the desired results include increasing team bonding and awareness **235**, enhancing ability to discover and resolve issues **240**, and improving the effectiveness of any group activity **245**. To complete this alternative exercise **210**, the participants need approximately between one to two and one-half hours **250**. The participants can be separated into teams of two, four, or six participants engaged in conjointly holding and perceiving the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** and other characteristics by holding the mat **15** above the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** and then working together to manipulate the mat **15** in order to be able to see the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15** to assemble perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions **260**.

As illustrated in FIG. **9**, an alternative exercise **270** of an application incorporating the system **10** includes as its objectives to discover insights into solving problems **275** and to learn new methods for problem solving **280**. As such, the desired results include expanding the range of options available **285**, finding and implementing better solutions **290**, and increasing solution acceptance **295**. To complete this alternative exercise **270**, the participants need approximately between one to two hours **305**. The participants can be separated into teams of two, four, or six participants engaged in conjointly holding and perceiving the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** and other characteristics by holding the mat **15** above the plurality of reflective surfaces **130** and then working together to manipulate the mat **15** in order to be able to see the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** on the bottom surface **30** of the mat **15** to assemble perceptions, interpretations, and conclusions **310**.

The system **10** is not limited to exercises described above. The system **10** can also be used to develop brainstorming analysis among co-workers. For example, if a uniquely identifiable indicia **35** imprinted on the bottom portion **30** of the mat **15** is unclear, the participants can discuss different ways to correct the situation, including cleaning the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**, changing the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**, lowering the mat **15** closer to the plurality of reflective surfaces **130**, or utilizing visualization aides, such as eyeglasses. The system **10** can also be utilized to develop and/or improve the ability to analyze. For example, an application can encourage the participants to describe the various uniquely identifiable indicia **35** appearing on the top portion **20** and the bottom portion **30** of the mat **15**, as well as encouraged to describe the correlation between the uniquely identifiable indicia **35** seen on the plurality of reflective surfaces

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130 and the uniquely identifiable indicia 35 seen on the top portion 20 of the mat 15. The number of participants can vary, as well as the number and the shape of the plurality of reflective surfaces 130, such as mirrors, the length and number of tethers 60, as well as the tasks to be completed.

It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the embodiments described above, but encompasses any and all embodiments within the scope of the following claims.

I claim:

1. A team-building educational training system, comprising:

a mat having a plurality of openings defined, a top surface, and a bottom surface, each of the surfaces including uniquely identifiable indicia displayed thereon;

means for grasping the mat, the means for grasping being designed and configured to be held by one of more hands; and

a plurality of reflective surfaces positioned below the mat and arranged to reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia imprinted on the bottom surface of the mat;

wherein users manipulate the mat by the means for grasping to align at least one of the openings with at least one of the reflective surfaces in order to see a reflection of the uniquely identifiable indicia displayed on the bottom surface of the mat.

2. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, further comprising at least one light source disposed on the bottom surface of said mat, the at least one light source being configured to illuminate reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia displayed on the bottom surface of the mat when the reflections of the indicia are visible on the reflective surfaces.

3. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, wherein the uniquely identifiable indicia comprises at least one indicium selected from the group of indicia consisting of words, colors, numbers, shapes, and symbols.

4. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, wherein the uniquely identifiable indicia comprises at least one indicium selected from the group of indicia consisting of misspelled words, illustrations, anagrams, ciphers, and crossword puzzles.

5. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of openings have a shape selected from the group consisting of squares, circles, ovals, rectangles, triangles, trapezoids, octagons, hexagons, and pentagons.

6. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of reflective surfaces comprises a plurality of mirrors.

7. The team-building educational training system according to claim 1, wherein the at least one light source comprises a light source selected from the group consisting of flashlights and glowsticks.

8. A team-building educational training system, comprising:

a mat having a top surface, a bottom surface, and a plurality of windows defined therein, each of the surfaces including uniquely identifiable indicia displayed thereon;

means for grasping the mat, the means for grasping being designed and configured to be held by one of more hands;

a plurality of reflective surfaces disposed on a supporting surface under the mat and arranged to reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia displayed on the bottom surface of the mat when the mat is raised above the supporting surface; and

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at least one light source attached to the bottom surface of the mat and configured to illuminate reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia when the reflections are visible on the reflective surfaces;

wherein a team of users may cooperatively manipulate the mat by the means for grasping to align at least one of the plurality of windows with at least one of the plurality of reflective surfaces so that at least one team member is able to see reflections of the uniquely identifiable indicia on the reflective surfaces.

9. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, wherein the uniquely identifiable indicia comprises at least one indicium selected from the group consisting of words, colors, numbers, shapes, and symbols.

10. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, wherein the uniquely identifiable indicia comprises at least one indicium selected from the group consisting of misspelled words, illustrations, anagrams, ciphers, and crossword puzzles.

11. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, wherein said windows comprise at least one opening defined in said mat.

12. The team-building educational training system according to claim 11, wherein said at least one opening has a shape selected from the group consisting of square, circular, oval, rectangular, triangular, trapezoidal, octagonal, hexagonal, and pentagonal.

13. The team-building educational training system according to claim 11, wherein said window further comprises a sheet of transparent material extending across the opening.

14. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, wherein the plurality of reflective surfaces comprises a plurality of mirrors.

15. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, wherein the at least one light source is a light source selected from the group consisting of flashlights and glowsticks.

16. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, further comprising a crescent-shaped flexible member attached to the bottom surface of said mat adapted for suspending an object above said reflective surfaces when said mat is raised.

17. The team-building educational training system according to claim 8, further comprising a plurality of straps extending from the mat, the straps being adapted for gripping by team members to raise and manipulate the mat.

18. An educational method for building a team, comprising the steps of:

providing a mat having a plurality of openings, a top surface, and a bottom surface, each of the surfaces including uniquely identifiable indicia displayed thereon;

providing a plurality of graspable members attached to the mat;

placing a plurality of reflective surfaces on a supporting surface under the mat, the reflective surfaces being configured to reflect the uniquely identifiable indicia when the mat is raised above the supporting surface;

selecting an exercise;

collaborating among the participants to achieve a common goal;

lifting and manipulating the mat by the graspable members above the supporting surface as a team;

positioning the lifted mat so that each of the participants is capable of viewing at least one of the plurality of openings; and

looking through the plurality of openings in the mat while
the mat is being lifted and manipulated in order to view
a reflection of the uniquely identifiable indicia on the
reflective surfaces;
whereby the participants are capable of interpreting the 5
reflection; and
whereby the participants are capable of drawing a conclu-
sion collectively based on the reflection.

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